

The Digitization of Local Government as a Factor of Performance of Local Authorities in Benin

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Abstract

More than a decade of implementation of administrative decentralization in Benin, local communities are struggling to find their letter of nobility. The municipal administration remains virtually invisible, with procedures inappropriate and poorly scanned. The communal information, which should be an indicator of visualization of the shares of good local governance, is almost absent. Diagnostic analysis of the poor performance recorded in almost all common factors reveals the deficit of communal scanning as a fundamental variable. The borrowed methodological approach relies on a personal observation of procedures in municipal and local authorities. A collection of information from users of twenty-three communities was realized and complemented by analysis of documents. The analysis draws on the presuppositions of the administrative theories combined with the paradigms of sociology of local communities. This paper attempts to justify the stakes of a scan of the local administration in Benin and its implications on local development requirements.

Keywords: *Decentralization - local authorities - digitization of administration- Benin*

Introduction

If the end of the 20th century was the century of the explosion of information and especially of access for all to information and knowledge, “the 21st century is designated as the age where information will constitute the central element of civilization”. The conclusion is unequivocal. Information Communication Technology (ICT), and particularly the Internet, is on the world market a great growing. Technologies represent a meaning economic sector. Beyond the strictly economic issues, ICTs provide considerable industrial and social changes with the emergence of new occupations, new challenges, new organizations and new operating modes in administrations. In a democracy, a people, by its free determination, decided for the major societal choices. This regime “condemns to death if citizens who perform these choices are pronounced in ignorance of the realities, the blindness of a passion or the illusion of a fleeting impression¹”. In that fact, a new approach is to pass from resistance information to documentary reflex. If citizens must be informed, what is there for members of local authorities, employees and elected officials?

With the decentralization of the administration, in the 1990s, local authorities have powers and flexibilities for them also to enter the era of technologies of the information. They should register all of their shares in a dynamic environment where local management and administrative

¹Jean-François REVEL. 1988. La connaissance inutile. Grasset.

scan rhyme with performance. In this call to the computerization of the communal action, municipalities become users, creators, attendants of new modes of communication and information that were put in place; thanks to the technological advances of recent years, especially the internet. The challenges are majors. Ease of access to information should induce more transparency and accountability with regard to accountability accounts that require local governance today. Shore et al. (2012) observe that “availability of data scanned locally enables the development of democratic, social applications and innovative economic offering more services to local citizens and users. They can reinforce the attractiveness of local communities and federate the cooperation between various factors, including private ones”². This new perspective to prompt local entities appears to explain the under-performance of decentralized local entities which, more than a decade of implementation, reflect biased results that would have further improved if ICT were borrowed from the local service. In this perspective, the electronic local government is therefore an innovation, a current technique of sustainable public services on offer. Well integrated and managed professionally, it would serve as an effective tool for performance of local authorities at the same time an instrument of modernization.

This paper, based on analysis assessment of the functionality of the local administration in Benin, tries to defend the major idea that the digitization of local administration is a factor of performance of local authorities in Benin.

Materials and Methods

This research which is comparative and transverse and borrowed the blended approach combines the theories of science by the administration with the methods of social science research. Indeed, the evolution of the context in which the municipal administration operates has led to an increase in the requirements that municipal managers must meet. The anticipation on the future of local communities for supplies of essential social services and testimony of good performance brings to marry the presuppositions of the prospective studies for the purpose of better position the issues and benefits of the digitization of local governments in Benin. Semi-structured interviews policy was used to collect information. The first allowed taking knowledge of the perceptions of users on the news of the decentralization in Benin. They also allow locating the factors of blocking of the digitization of local public administration. Semi-structured interviews helped to assess the level of computerization of administrations and computer knowledge of administrative staff. On the basis of the method of reasoned choice, the data collection is made in twenty-three (23) municipalities including nine (9) urban and thirteen (13) rural. At the level of each municipality, eight (8) users were selected, three (3) officers of the Town Hall and two (2) locally elected representatives. It follows that the analysis made is based on two hundred and ninety-nine (299) individuals, of whom forty-six (46) were selected for the semi-directive interviews and two hundred and fifty-three (253) for the directive interviews.

Overview of Functionality of Local Administration and Performance of Municipalities

Local government in the context of decentralization means “management of Municipal Affairs Unit. It is constituted by all the services which the good market allows the realization of

²Michèle Rive et al.2012/4. «information, a challenge for local authorities, Documentaliste-Sciences Information (Vol. 49), pp. 44-59.DOI 10.3917/docs.494.0044

the objectives defined by the political power". The concept of public administration can be understood in terms of the bodies or activities pursuing the general interest. From the point of view of activities (substantive meaning), public administration is understood as "the activity by which the public authorities make use, where appropriate, of the prerogatives of the public satisfaction of public interest needs ".But in its most broad sense, the administration refers both to public administration as private and means the activity consisting in administering, i.e. to manage a case and the body which exercises this activity. "Local administration", Mpinga means people who depend on public territorial other than the State; that is cities, areas, chiefdoms and centers. This is the case of the provinces and territories or precincts whose substantive jurisdiction is limited to only a portion of the national territory.

The juxtaposition of the components and procedures of local government with the current practice in Benin draws a uniform trend of low staffing of management capabilities.

For municipal officials, local Government was only an extension of public administration; the routine tradition characterizing the two levels. Optimal transfer of skills and resources attached to the ability of Commons well to mobilize resources and manage them should facilitate enlivening of local governance based on a powerful administrative principle. However, the review of the performance of local governments show operation to the test based on the materialization of folders and a manual practice of operations; a set of methods little adapted to modernity and which encroach on the modern needs.

From the point of view of users, the expected decentralization change is almost as fragmented and inconspicuous. For them, the current local administration is uncooperative, latent and weakly oriented towards the needs of the citizens. It is reductive to an archives service where the civil State and land are the two active components of the daily administrative. Design of users, a re-appropriation of the local administrative functions, attached to scanning functions and procedures are guarantees of sustainable local communities in the service of the public.

In the opinion of the elect, institutional bias sometimes relating to recruitment of untrained administrative staff and inadequate equipment (computer tools) seem to explain the low recorded performance. Indeed, assessment of the educational profiles of executives of territorial administration shows incompatibilities with current realities.

E- Administration

E-government refers to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by public institutions to develop public services on-line towards a so-called "zero paper" option. E-administration offers the possibility to process large quantities of records within a short time thereby reducing or changing of procedures. This simplifies procedures and address constraints by minimising routines:

- to develop cooperation between local entities in the sharing of management skills and provisions of public services - to synergize some local works on specific projects
- to develop a delegation of inter-municipal competence
- to increase the quality of the service rendered - to increase its efficiency and to justify administrative performance.

The contribution of ICTs is available both in terms of organization of the administrations, and offer new services to the public while playing a decisive role in the development of the

territories. In the context of decentralization and the benefits of these technologies, improvement of the inner workings of the community can be felt. Thanks to the intranet and technology for messaging, which allow a real transformation of the mode of action of administration, a new role in the hierarchy, the redefinition of the missions of the services, to exchange information, networking. Time is no longer information retention and it struggles between decentralized administration.

In this perspective, the supporting role of ICT is done in the exercise of local democracy and in relation with citizens in, for example, improving the participation of communities in local life through discussion forums, direct exchanges with the elected through the mail. The tele-procedures will facilitate the access to the administration by reducing the mobilities, the expectations, by dispensing with the schedules. The connection of the internet administration induced dynamics of visibility of municipal actions, access to global and information independent of the respective responsibilities of different communities through links between sites is a flow of information and a direct and fast communication between citizens and the elected. This technological revival can serve as an instrument in promoting local tourism, economic activities, local entertainment, cultural activities, and educational activities.

E-administration, with regard to local issues of decentralization, appears as a key instrument in the service of the decentralized entities. It will promote access to all citizens for the sake of equality, to basic social services with reduction of time and costs. It therefore implies new organizations or new modes of functioning of public services, by the flow of information, facilitation of access to the internet and the pursuit of constant concern beyond the administrative routine and improve the daily lives of users.

The current socio-economic changes and the challenges of decentralization require a rereading of the modes of administrative behavior and a new alternative of provision of public services. These requirements arising from the needs of users and the need for local administrative reforms, lead to rethinking the modes of local governance in terms of computerization of local authorities.

Users' Expectations

In the new perspective of digitization of local governments, citizens' expectations of their communities are large and will continue to grow. The call to the computerization of administrative procedures (92% of respondents), the filing of requests and their processing via mail (64.82% of respondents), access to basic data and updated information (96.84% of respondents), the issuance of public services by fast technological channels (72.2% of respondents), reinforce this feeling of a strong expectation of citizens for an online administration.

In this new technological order, an administrative services user sees a time saver (94.6% of respondents) with restrictions on his movements and the end of the queue (94.6% of respondents), a modern administration available 24 hours (85% of the respondents), the possibility of traceability (68.77% of respondents), i.e. the monitoring of the progress of its applications and requests online. He is also awaiting the security of entrusted data (98.02% of respondents). All indices of operation which is cumulative, justify a good administrative performance of local authorities.

But the routine crystallized around the ancient practices, e-administration induced new transforms: internally with a duty to accommodate in terms of time of work, human resources and management capacity, resistance to change, training to accompany these strong developments

of trades. Also does it promote the increase in geographical or sociological, inequalities between urban and rural areas?

That is why, the central State, in the role of trusteeship which it is assigned, must redefine its policy of the digital economy. An exceptional budget line will therefore be reserved for local authorities to further operationalise the goals of decentralization in Benin. For this purpose, it must: (i) accompany the devolution and facilitate understanding between technical teams; (ii) facilitate the conduct of transversal projects combining different services; (iii) accelerate decision-making and facilitate anticipation by a more rapid flow of information and the ability to aggregate or cross data; (iv) contribute to the establishment of a municipal data bank; (v) allow the implementation of a system of control and recovery of local taxes and fees; (vi) sit a management with quantified targets control indicators and dashboards and finally, (vii) install common software that could directly evaluate the daily performance of municipal agents.

Computerization of Local Communities: Benefits and Challenges

For local authorities, the principal challenge is to adapt both to new modes of life of the citizens and their new uses, a computerization objective more accessible to all. The computerization of local governments and State, thus contributes not only to improving the situation of each information system, but again, a synergy effect, solidarity across that form the institutional actors between them, thanks to a rapid transfer data, magnetic media replacing the paper, through an intensification of exchanges, the better (more accurate data accurate and up-to-date) and to a suppression of redundancy and duplication of functions. Local public administration would thus be a true gain in productivity and performance.

In the context of ongoing mutations, the computerization of local governments is imperative for local communities. This requirement is revealed in the stimuli which they are objects on the part of researchers, partners and users. This computerization is not merely in the possession of some hardware; it must include the development of application automating tasks, the development of on-line services that save time and reduce wait times for government users. Its outcome is beneficial for parties, users and administration.

For the former, it is the availability of data or useful statistics in real time, wanted to support, the issue time of administrative acts and citizen control broader and more comprehensive. For the latter, it is the simplification of tasks, efficiency in the achievement of the objectives, the traceability of acts, transparent management and benefits self-assessment more objective and simpler procedures.

Fialaire (2016) shows the importance of computerization when he says, *“the evolution of the computer tool is crucial. Opening opportunities increasingly broader communication between services, computerization is charged with an ambition for the restructuring of the administrative apparatus. Considerable technical advances now allow the establishment from terminals of real networks connecting different administrations. Wide-ranging achievements will emerge. The methods of use of the computer know a sensitive mutation incorporating transactional and conversational patterns resulting in exchanges of information in time Real (consultation/ updating of data) between the user and the computer system. At the same time, the improving performance of microcomputers and the lowering of costs make it possible perspective of the generalization of its distribution in all of the departments. Their blueprints retain new architectures leading to progressive passive consoles “l’abandon and their replacement by workstations intelligent”*.

These various benefits are perceived by users, citizens, and administrative staff. Beyond these advantages, it is the sense of “modernity” implied by computerization, which is also perceived by many users and administrative staff (95% of the respondents). Computerization is for some, a way out of State conflicts (76%). For these, the computerization of databases of landholdings, with full information on these, and the properties would contribute to the securing of land transactions, reducing cost, loads of the courts. Among users, 58.1% show, the State of insecurity of the civil State. They think that computerization of local governments is a means and an instrument for verification and checking the authenticity of the acts of civil status in the preparation of vital parts. For the authorities, the administration information constitutes a real tool of cultural and tourist promotion, an instrument of mobilization of internal resources, through the constitution of databases being data on local businesses.

So far as the merits and scanning utilities are known, why all these delays in its implementation?

The computerization of the administration is therefore, with regard to the ongoing traditional practices in local government, an innovation process, and therefore an action involving changes in habits, practices and behaviors. It is perceived as a means of transparent management of public affairs. It is therefore an instrument that would deny fraud and reduce acts of corruption that were once set up as standards and reduce the chances of performance of administrative entities. For example, computerization can meet de facto resistance forces. It is the opinion of 62% of users that the local administration, in its current state cannot lead effectively such a reform, as staff, accustomed to the routine administrative and «illiterate» information and communication technologies is sometimes resistant to innovation. These are 96, 44% of surveyed users justify this delay also by the attitude and the propensity of the agents to corruption and cheating. For the administrative staff in his set, it is the inadequacy of financial resources, which constitutes the main reasons for the delay which the source is the non-transfer of powers by the central State to local communities; There is the absence of the political will for 75% of the surveyed staff, and restriction of the activities of local communities according to 55% of the surveyed staff.

Furthermore, a detour in the municipalities noted that none of the councils has developed an application for some task; no internet connection in all rural town halls and only 3 of 9 urban city councils have the internet at a very low rate. No local network collaboration is available for all 23 mayors. Only 6 of the 23 have a computer service, and for those who have, the activities of this service are summarized in the maintenance of computer hardware (desktop, printer...). According to 77, 86% of users, it is not uncommon as a full hour of work that the secretaries who remain the main beneficiaries of these desktops are delivered to distraction games “*our tasks on computer are limited to the seizure of administrative emails; idle, we deal through game and video*” said a Secretary of 37 years. This observation reflects both ignorance and lack of will of the authorities in search of performance and quality.

Modernization issues of local communities in Benin

In its “White paper” editorial, Chiarelli (2011) writes: the new technologies of information and communication (NTIC) have become a condition sine qua non for the success of the projects in local communities. The IT investment for the local public sector and the devolved administrations is one of the most effective ways to reduce the weight of public spending and meet the objectives of ongoing modernization in companies. Analysis upstream of the specific needs of constituents and local users proved to be crucial. Indeed, according to survey data, it appears that almost 87% users consider useful the digitization of local administration. More than 75% regretted the deficit in direct contact with the balance sheets of the municipalities

in terms of accountability. Most intellectuals bemoan the inequality of access to municipal information and consider instead the need to be able to perform more actions in access to services online. The implementation of modern tools considers new ways of working. These uses are developing widely but require an adaptation or clarification of organizations:

- Collaborative work simplifies administrative procedures and improves individual and collective productivity.
- Nomads (internet, mobile phone...) allow agents to work more effectively on the ground enjoying immediate access to information and transmitting real-time activity reports.
- Telework encourages economic policies (employment in rural areas, fight against absenteeism...), social (employment of persons with disabilities...) and environmental (limitation of movements).

With this in mind, using digital as a lever to improve the public service is more topical than ever in the decentralized communities. To this end, the development of the digital economy plan should have as its objective the diversification of uses and services for the citizen. This digital transformation must in particular be achieved through the implementation of technological solutions: (i) development of e-Government; (ii) facilitation of access to basic social services by digital; (iii) deployment of ICTs at the service of the local economy and community well-being.

However, the observation of computer Park of communal administrations reveals that the quality of the internet service is totally deficient with a modernization routine and slow administrative procedure. Practically, expenditures for local communities in Benin are insignificant except rare efforts at the level of Commons with special status and some fairly urban communes. In rural municipalities, computer comes down to simple applications of seizure data and impressions of administrative documents (see table below). While under current societal mutations and new requirements arising from developments in e-Government, it is desirable to develop efforts brought towards equality and the simplification of access to new services, for all citizens and users of municipalities for greater visibility of the actions of local authorities.

Table 1: Summary of functional computers in town halls

Town	Number of desktop computer	Number of laptop
Cotonou	16	10
Parakou	12	8
Natitingou	7	3
Porto-Novo	14	6
Abomey-calavi	11	7
Djougou	8	5
Lokossa	5	3
Kandi	9	3
Abomey	6	4
Segbana	2	1
Gogounou	4	2
Bembèrèkè	3	2

Toffo	2	1
Comé	2	1
Aplahoué	2	1
Kétou	3	3
Dangbo	4	5
Ifangni	2	2
Bassila	3	2
Lalo	2	1
Bantè	3	4

Source: Data Field in 2016

Discussions: Utilities of the digital administration for local communities

E-government, with its justified functionalities, will allow internal optimization and attractiveness to the local, an optimization of the process and a sustainable local economic development, a valorization of the local heritage, competition of local public policies, the promotion of a sustainable and competitive local government with development-oriented services towards the needs of the citizens. Ever evolving ICT - mobile applications, high speed broadband, web portal, etc. - themselves as drivers of the process undertaken to modernize local governments in the era of decentralization. Around the information system, they allow to automate and improve business processes, enhance cooperation between administrations and to improve exchanges with citizens, while reducing associated costs and environmental impact. They provide less time, less money spent for a better quality of service delivery to citizens.

Local communities, through the digitization of the administration, critical link in the sustainable relationship and proximity and performance, will become major players in the modernization of decentralization. They will facilitate the construction of the municipalities of tomorrow. Exchange platforms and social networks to be born will strengthen relations between citizens and local communities with a strong impact on their internal organization. Scan appears in the light of the benefits it offers: an instrument of administrative simplification, acceleration of trade, reduction of costs and dematerialization thereby turning the lives of agents. The modernization of the administrative environment that it impulse brings, moreover, a positive evolution, both at the level of the user and at the level of the agent itself. Thanks to these new uses and tools, the citizen will receive a better service. As the agent, it will have the opportunity to evolve, to adopt new ways of working, new tools and information systems, thus ensuring a better steering of the community such as civil status, transport, social assistance, assistance at home, education, recruitment, childhood, library service, sport... the services offered to citizens multiply. Thanks to the modernization of the public sector policy initiated by the State and the communities. By proposing a simplified and direct access to the information, the counter accompanies and guides the user through its efforts. The local authorities, for their part, must therefore adapt accordingly to provide services appropriate to their missions.

Both in terms of jobs and innovations, local digital technology is proving to be a key driver of growth: broadband coverage, internet access, computer equipment. From the literature review, it appears that by 2015 more than a million Beninese were connected to the mobile internet, or 37% of users; an increase of 27% from 2012. The digital revolution seems running and becomes a requirement in almost all areas. New information and communication technologies are now part of the daily life of Benin. The public sector and especially local communities

must fit into the same dynamic and even anticipate offering innovative services to citizens. Even if issues occur in certain municipalities in the South-benign, barely 11 per cent of the municipalities may justify a fair computerization of their administrations.

The high-speed development of new uses linked to technological evolutions in terms of dematerialization, mobility and collaborative work multiplies the new services within the communities and leads to the concept of a digital city: touch terminals, free broadband access, mobile applications, digital processing of files and administrative supports, public opening of government data ... will enable the local authorities of Benin to open up to the grassroots population and modernize their performance.

The different administrations, and in particular local communities, perform missions whose quality and relevance require a more close proximity relationship with citizens and between the agents themselves. ICTs are an ideal vehicle for improving trade and productivity ... provided they are deployed and used wisely.

The appearance and development of information communication technology (ICT), considered as favorable to growth and employment, will largely contribute to the modernization of local public administration and will take a place in the reform of the operational capability of the decentralized entities State. The adoption of digital technologies within the administration will initiate root changes, in its relations with the citizens, but also in its own organization.

Opening up relations with users

By exceeding the sectorial approach, the traditional silo administration now favors a transversal vision in its relations with users. The online publication of those essential information held by the administration powers new spaces of debates and reflections. The gradual and systematic dematerialization of administrative procedures facilitates the life of the citizen by enabling him to reduce the physical displacements and the waiting, now unavoidable, to obtain administrative documents.

Conditionality: by the way of approaches

It will be necessary to:

- **Organize internal networks:** By hierarchical nature, the municipal administration must evolve into an organization in networks, with three important consequences on the reform of the administration: (i) acceleration of the process of decision and return in question traditional practices; (ii) rapid evolution of administrative tasks and deleting more repetitive and less rewarding; (iii) strengthening the autonomy of agents, facilitating the performance and growth of value-added of each within a team. This modernization of public services by the transition to e-Government must lead to a reflection on the impacts in terms of investment and cost; this limits municipal finance for a rationalization of the procedure.
- **Clear productivity gains:** In fact, the implementation of electronic administration requires expenses on equipment (purchase of computers, production of content, computer connections...), adaptation of the qualifications and skills of all staff and the need to ensure the principle of equality of access and continuity of public services. Nevertheless, the adoption of information and communication technologies should allow better optimization of expenditures and increase the productivity of public services. The

success of the administration services online requires new systems of information needed to assess the results and costs of public policy.

The modernization of local governance is therefore a long-term work whose journey is not linear. Behind the technical issues, the scanning will participate in the conduct of change. It requires this fact, ambition, duration and vision strategic (Guillaume, 2002). Local administration will increase administrative supply to the supply of services by providing a custom tracking records.

Analytically, the performance of local administrations will depend in large part on the quality of human resources that are affected. However, one of the major evils to which local authorities are confronted is the inadequate qualification of agents and their assignment to positions which did not correspond to their profiles. Human resources management was often carried out on a weekly basis on the basis of partial and often outdated information. For example, three separate databases had been counted within the Directorate of financial affairs and administrative department in charge of decentralization, which did not have an overview of the complete inventory of jobs; for best results should be questioning old practices of human resources management.

Implementation of the digitized organic framework would lead to positive results. As a modern tool for human resources management, it will generate automatically the organic frameworks and the various states of the workforce within the decentralized entities. From this theoretical perspective, a challenge for the future is the deployment of the scanned organic framework pilot at the level of 77 local authorities of Benin so that results will be more felt nationally. It should be as suggested by Koupaki (2016), in its project of society: *promoting approaches, methods and the most modern management tools including the public management, projects management and the information technology as integrators, levers and accelerators of change and performance*. This requires drawing on the many successful experiences of modernization and digital government in the world and in Africa.

Conclusion

The analysis of decentralizing practice in the territorial communities of Benin reveals the effects of a decentralization that is poorly adapted and tested. Whether it is local governance or the steering of community development, the general trend refers to approximate local administrations with performances that testify to the lack of ownership of the stakes by local actors, which justifies their low participation in the contributions of efforts towards communal development. From the analysis of the heavy trends to the emergence of local authorities in Benin, it emerges that digitization (for greater visibility) is an indicative way of progress for local authorities. Beyond the challenges it raises, the digitization of local administrations becomes more than ever an instrument serving the performance of decentralized entities. Facilitating accountability, easing bureaucratic procedures, dematerialization of administrations, proactivity in the delivery of local public services, as many referential gains that are digitized and accompanied by policies.

In its political objective, decentralization aims to create opportunities for the implementation of programmes and projects in local communities and improve the impact of different interventions. Local communities are thus entrusted a key role in the implementation of basic infrastructure such as the construction and administration of schools, health facilities, roads, supply of water in the development of agriculture and computerization. Thus, in a vision of visibility and capitalization, information and communication technology (ICT) plays a leading role in the decentralization process and in the economic and social development of the Commons, by improving the efficiency of public administrations and the productivity of local interventions.

These ICTs would promote (i) **faster services**: better circulation of information by electronic means and instruction time shortcuts; (ii) **better managed services**: better knowledge of costs and pooling of similar projects between administrations; (iii) **more efficient services**: suppression of repetitive tasks; (iv) **an approach that encompasses all administrative access points**: Desk, computer, kiosk, telephone, TV...

The digitization perspective of the administration will be part of an overall configuration of simplification of administrative procedures and has many comparative advantages: - bring together all the local administrative information on a single database - users from easily memorable point of many advantages: a friendly human reception with wide opening hours, saving time by avoiding travel and queues for simple information, reliable information certified by the administration, A service ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the information requested, a service ensuring mobility and accessibility for the greatest number of people ... - offering public servants a service that creates added value by ensuring that information First, by refocusing local officials on their main missions and by giving a simple and modern picture of the local public service - offering communities and public services a service generating management gains and contributing to the economic valuation of the municipalities.

The future of local communities and their profoundest performance depends largely on the level of adoption of computerization.

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